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UNCLAS HO CHI MINH CITY 000265

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

Department for EAP/BCLTV, EAP/P - K. Bailes

1E. O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PHUM PREL PGOV VM HUMANR

SUBJECT: PROPOSED PRESS GUIDANCE ON DR. QUE'S DETENTION

REF: HCMC 259

11. (SBU) Post has notified the HCMC External Relations Office (ERO), the local branch of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, of its interest in the case of Dr. Nguyen Dan Que, who was detained in HCMC on March 17 (reftel). We have also requested MFA assistance in obtaining additional information on the circumstances of his detention and general medical condition. As of COB March 19, the ERO was able to confirm only the basic facts as reported reftel. They were unable to provide any further clarification on the current status of his case, but have promised to continue to seek answers on our behalf in the morning. Post will continue to press for additional details.

12. (SBU) In a telephone conversation with Dr. Que's wife the afternoon of March 19, she said that she had gone to the Municipal Jail today with food, clothing, and medication. While she had been allowed to leave the articles there for Dr. Que, she had not been permitted to meet with him. When she requested an opportunity to meet with the Director of the facility, she was told that he was in meetings all day. She plans to return on March 20. In an interesting footnote, an official at the ERO mentioned twice today that Post probably had better first-hand information on what had happened than the MFA, a likely reference to Poloff's visit to Dr. Que's home the previous evening.

13. (U) Should the need arise, Post recommends the following press guidance, on an "if asked" basis:

14. (U) Begin Press Guidance: The local office of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Ho Chi Minh City has confirmed that Dr. Nguyen Dan Que is currently under detention in Ho Chi Minh City. The Consulate General has advised the Ministry of its strong interest in the case and asked for additional information on the specific circumstances of this prominent democracy activist's detention. The Consulate General is unable to speculate on the reasons for his detention at this time.

15. (U) Begin background: Dr. Que, an endocrinologist, is HCMC's best-known political dissident. He was taken to the local police station from his home at 8:00 p.m. Tuesday evening, March 18, and transferred to the Municipal Jail the following day. While in detention, his home was searched and a number of his possessions seized. His current legal status is not clear.

16. (U) Background continued: Dr. Que is 60 years old. He was imprisoned from 1978 to 1988, but was never charged or tried for any crime. In 1990, he was again imprisoned, this time after being convicted of attempting to overthrow the government (for writing and disseminating pro-democracy materials). He was sentenced to 20 years imprisonment to be followed by 5 years house arrest. He was released in a September 1998 amnesty (the first prisoner amnesty that saw the release of significant numbers of political prisoners).

17. (U) Background continued: Since his release, Dr. Que has faced varying degrees of harassment, including steady surveillance and monitoring of his activities and communications. His Internet and telephone access is regularly restricted. Dr. Que suffers from a bleeding ulcer and an unspecified kidney ailment, both of which require medication.

YAMAUCHI